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## The Ideological Collapse of the West, and Religion

By AVRO MANHATTAN

ONE of the most striking features about the West at present is its lack of an ideology. Not that the West can dispense with it. It needs one very badly; so badly that its absence has become the paramount weakness of the entire Western world. To the unreflecting, the mounting pile of atom bombs for a time appeared almost as its most providential substitute. This view, however, owing to the breaking of the atomic monopoly and to the increasing apprehension about the wisdom—or, rather, the folly—of relying on super-weapons, has now been, if not entirely, at least almost totally discarded.

The mirage of the remedial omnipotence of the Damoclean threat of, or the actual use of, atomic bombs, consequently, has withered very fast: faster even than professional pessimists had visualized. Which was foreseeable: the ephemerality of a permanent military terror, no matter how devastatingly coercive, having speedily become apparent to anyone concerned with the stabilization of a society whose mercurial abnormalities seemed to be produced by the irresistibility of certain disintegrating viruses feeding on some chronic spiritual gangrene growing within the very soul of the West.

The process of such decay—accelerated on the one side by the collapse of orthodox Right-wing totalitarianism, and on the other by the strengthening of revitalized Left-wing authoritarianisms—was speeded up by the unexpected vacuum into which the masses of the West found themselves once the war was over.

Democratic ideals, trumpeted from all the ruin-

tops of post-war Europe, had lost their ancient magic. Their acceptance, by victors and defeated alike, was of a most disconcertingly unenthusiastic and passive nature. And this indifference towards the very ideological ingredients which were meant to revitalize the West became even more striking when contrasted with the vitality which had characterized the tumbled totalitarianisms of the recent past, as well as those that had survived. It was the obvious, even if undeclared, reaction of the Western peoples against discredited political slogans in which they no longer wholly believed.

Urgent economic betterment, by generating confidence, would indirectly fill this most perilous ideological vacuum, it was thought. To a great extent, this policy was a success. Yet the temporary relief it afforded seemed unable to do much to reinvigorate the anæmic democratic ideology, or, more ominous still, to dispel the attraction that Communism had for a considerable portion of the Western masses.

The sundry economic and military commitments, meant to make the West impervious to Communism within and without, fared no better. The reason is obvious. A fortress whose masonry is held together with sand will not stand a single attack. It is perforce more of a danger to the constructor than to the foe against whom it is built. Unless erected with good cement, it will be useless. And the cement indispensable to holding together a class, a nation, a continent, or, for that matter, a whole civilization, is a constructive, dynamic, living ideology.

Has the democratic West as yet produced one comparable to those released by the extreme

wings of both the Left and the Right? It has not. Or, rather, it has attempted to do so by resorting to the unseemly use of a stimulant—i.e., organized religion.

Organized religion, that is to say, political Christianity, is becoming—in fact, has become—the ideological mainspring of the West. It has done more. It has put the democratic ideology into the background. Requests to fight for democracy are received with a tacit individual and mass inner scepticism, and unbreathed sneers, if not actual scorn. But appeals to defend Christian civilization can still awaken genuine popular support: indeed, can still galvanize into real action a not inconsiderable part of the Western nations.

Prime Ministers and local town councillors, when trying to be convincing, speak of the defence of Christianity. Democracy is mentioned, because this is expected, but unconvincingly and only by the way, unless a band of comely drum-majorettes be made to gambol in the village main street to make it more alluring.

Christianity, therefore, has come to play the role of the ideology which the West, so far, has been unable to produce. Indeed, it has become the very glue preventing it from being ideologically scattered into fragments.

Organized religion, consequently, having turned into the most dynamic force of the West, is now more powerful than the economically and politically mightiest Western nation, the U.S.A. Simply owing to this: that where American economic help or super-bombers cannot penetrate, a working ideology, in our case politicizing religion, can.

Political Christianity as such is not to the liking of every Western individual or social corporate element; it is not an ideology in the proper sense of the word; it is not even fundamentally political. In the present circumstances it has been converted into an emotional instrument directed at the exudation of self-exculpation and ideological odium. This religious-ideological odium is not new. It has been an integral part of the Western ideological framework since the inception of Communism as a world force. It powerfully contributed to the creation of Fascism after the First World War. It marred the relations between the Allies and Russia during the Second. And at present it is the keystone supporting the ideological vault of the anti-Soviet Western policy. Its intensification has made organized religion come to the fore, by identifying it with the ideological framework of the West as never in the past.

Thus, whereas the West backs its diplomacy with its industrial wealth or the threat of atom bombs,

political Christianity backs the anæmic Western ideological principles with organized religion translated into power politics.

Organized Christianity, however, has not only become an ideologically integral part of the internal framework of the West; it has become a paramount defender of Western influence in non-Western regions. The failure of the Western powers to stop the tide of Asiatic resurgence has rendered the co-operation of political Christianity as necessary in the Asiatic continent as it is in the European. For here again, while the West is able to supply dollars and armaments, it is unable to supply an ideology. The experience in Europe, having taught the Western Powers that a war, to be effective, needs to be fought also with ideologies, has convinced them that co-ordination must be extended to the minds of men everywhere and simultaneously. Hence the striking synchronization of the moves of organized Christianity and the Western Powers to mobilize native religions throughout the Asiatic continent.

Asia is dominated by the two largest religions after Christianity: Buddhism and Islam. The bulk of Buddhism, being in Mao's Red China, is beyond the scope of the contemplated Western spiritual mobilization. Islam, however, could easily become the Asiatic counterpart of Christianity in the West. How could Christianity influence this great, non-Christian world? By the principle that the urge to survive might produce a Christian-Moslem alliance which otherwise would have been impossible.

The enlistment of Islam would have immense potentialities. For Islam, even more than Christianity, is not only a religious system but also a way of life identified with the moral, social, and political ethics of the nations professing it. If successfully mobilized, it could bring organized religion across three continents, from North-West Africa to the Near, Middle, and Far East, almost to the Pacific Ocean. Viewed from that light, therefore, it seems as if Islam might be made to play the same role in Asia as Christianity is now playing in the West, owing to the inability of both continents to produce a new living ideology.

Such attempts, however, will ultimately fail, dollars and theologies being unable to fill a universal spiritual void. And the ideological void to be found in Asia and in the West at present is not only deadly, it is bottomless. Yet something could successfully bridge its widening gap: an entirely new conception of society, more attuned to the technical, economic, and social potentialities of the twentieth century.

If democracy as hailed by the West is being proved outdated, it is for the West to breathe into



it such a breath of new life as to confound all the ideological extremisms which so far have seduced a great portion of mankind and, indeed, have sapped the inner strength of those very democratic principles which permitted them to grow.

The West, in close alliance with organized Christianity, now is mobilizing the world against what they consider a hostile ideology. Whether the extinction, or even the checking, of such an ideology justifies their actions is anybody's opinion. But, should war be made to burst upon the planet, for how long would the Christian-Western ideological patchwork endure?

A civilization which relies only upon its gold to move the spirit of men ultimately is doomed to failure. A political system which relies upon tenets conceived by medieval theology as a substi-

tute for a dynamic philosophy is already condemned. The Christian-Western alliance can check expanding Communism. But for how long? A society unable to produce a living ideology might be driven to seek relief in a third world war, to give itself the illusion that it is still vigorously alive. Up to now, political Christianity, the Catholic portion of which has already begotten a discreditable new form of Right-wing totalitarianism, has been the pitiful ideological substitute of the West, the oxygen pumped into its hollow framework. The cure, however, will prove of short duration. For oxygen can revive only temporarily; it cannot reinvigorate a dying person. Indeed, when administered to enforce too hasty a revival, often, instead of a quicker recovery it is the cause of a swifter collapse.

## Is Solomon a Myth?

A REPLY TO MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH

WHILE thanking Mr. Howell Smith for his kind reference to my book *The Hero*, I may point out that Henry V's historical personality, as vouched for by contemporary documents, has no counterpart in the case of Solomon. *Kings*, according to Mr. Howell Smith, was written about four hundred years after Solomon's alleged date, and I should put it later, though before *Chronicles*. Of the latter he says that "the Chronicler drastically alters many of the earlier author's statements"; but it would be more accurate to say that he tells a different story. Since there is no confirmation of either story, there is no reason to believe one truer than the other.

What Mr. Howell Smith fails to realize is that all Scripture is purely and simply propaganda, and, however much it may profess to deal with the past, is directed solely to the circumstances of the day. The stories in *Kings* and *Chronicles* are different because the times called, in the minds of the writers, for different types of propaganda.

In general, the story of the Old Testament is the story of a long contest between what we may term the Guelphs and Ghibellines among the Jews—that is to say, the sacerdotalists and the royalists. As each in turn acquired the power to do so, they made additions to the Scriptures embodying propaganda for their own side. It is highly improbable that there was ever, before the Exile, a joint kingdom of Israel and Judah, but each had among other gods—the Hebrews of those days were unquestionably polytheists—a special patron, Saul for Israel, David or Dōd for Judah. Their stories were embodied in sacred myths

which the sacerdotalists, when they came into power after the Exile, could not abolish, but which they altered by reducing the status of the gods to that of kings, introducing stories to their discredit, and bringing in Samuel, a purely fictitious, as opposed to a mythical, character, to order them about. The royalists, in their turn, brought up Solomon as a reinforcement, but the sacerdotalists effectively countered by introducing Moses, of whom the writers of *Kings* and *Chronicles* had obviously never heard.

The contest, which was, of course, far more complex than the above outline suggests, was carried on into the New Testament under the banners of SS. Peter and Paul. But Mr. Howell Smith would reduce these fervent seekers after righteousness as they saw it, these enthusiasts whose words have stirred the hearts of millions, to the status of a set of fumbling antiquaries. It is astonishing that the writer of *Thou Art Peter* should have so little idea of what religion means.

I have omitted the archaeological aspect. There were no doubt, as Mr. Howell Smith says, temples in Jerusalem before the Maccabees, but the point is that the building described as the chief glory of Solomon probably never existed. As for Megiddo, Mr. Howell Smith's argument is that as Solomon is said to have built Megiddo, and Megiddo existed, therefore Solomon must have existed. By the same argument the existence of the Devil's Dyke, said to have been built by the Devil, proves the existence of the Devil.

RAGLAN.